



NEWS RELEASE

NATIONAL AGRICULTURAL STATISTICS SERVICE

United States Department of Agriculture • Washington, DC 20250

Ag Statistics Hotline: 1-800-727-9540 • www.usda.gov/nass/



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NATION'S 26th CENSUS OF AGRICULTURE BEGINS THIS WEEK

WASHINGTON, Dec. 16, 2002 - This week, the USDA's National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS) will mail the 2002 Census of Agriculture to every farmer and rancher in the Nation. It marks the 26th national measurement of agriculture since the first agriculture census was taken in 1840. Only America's farmers and ranchers can supply the answers needed to produce a useful, accurate picture of this vital industry.

Farmers and ranchers are being asked to report on their operations during 2002 and return their completed forms by Feb. 3, 2003. Everyone who receives a census form is required by law to return it, (Title 7, U.S. Code) even those who did not operate a farm or ranch in 2002.

NASS has provided a convenient toll-free number, 1-888-4AG-STAT, for producers who need help completing their form. Farmers and ranchers who do not receive a census report form by the end of January 2003 can call the toll-free number to ensure they are counted.

The same law requiring response also ensures that information provided by individual farm operators is held strictly confidential. No data will be disclosed on any individual operation. In fact, even copies retained by farmers and ranchers are immune from legal process. Results are provided only in statistical totals summarized to the county, state or national level.

The census report forms ask basic questions about land use and ownership, crop acreage and quantities harvested, livestock and poultry inventories, value of crops and livestock sold and farm operator characteristics.

New questions will ask about multiple operators per farm, certified organic acreage, production contracts, computer and Internet use, grain storage capacity, farm labor and specialized commodities such as bison, deer, elk, llamas, emus and ostriches.

The census of agriculture tracks an industry that has changed dramatically throughout history. The 2002 Census of Agriculture will show changes since the last census in 1997. Data from the census are used by many in the public and private sectors to help chart the future of agriculture. County-level census results are used by:

- S Farm organizations** to evaluate and propose agriculture policies and programs.
- S Agribusinesses** to help meet farmers needs for items such as fertilizer, seed, and equipment.
- S Land-grant universities** to allocate funding, by county, for cooperative extension programs and services.
- S Congressional staff** to propose changes in the farm bill and other farm-related legislation.

- S Farmers and ranchers** to make decisions about potential new opportunities, efficiencies, and whether to make changes in their enterprises.
- S Colleges and universities** to develop new and improved methods to increase agriculture production.
- S State departments of agriculture** for response operations during drought and emergency outbreaks of diseases or infestations of pests.
- S Federal government officials** to draft legislation to help resolve agricultural problems and strengthen the industry.

Census results will be released on Feb. 3, 2004, at www.usda.gov/nass/. For more information, call the Agricultural Statistics Hotline at 1-800-727-9540.

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NOTE TO EDITORS: For background information and sample 2002 Census report forms, and for data from the last Census, visit www.nass.usda.gov/census/. Public service announcements, news releases, editorials and similar materials may be found by clicking on “Help Us Promote the 2002 Census” or by calling 1-800-727-9540 or by contacting your local State Statistical Office at www.usda.gov/nass/ under “State Information.”

Find agricultural statistics for your county, State, and the Nation at www.usda.gov/nass/.